

Some Tribal Origins, Laws, and Customs of the Balkans

854 etc. There is a wooden grating—a ladder of laths—inside the cradle,
531 on which the child rests upon a cushion or mattress. It is covered usually with the cotton-stuffed coverlet ("jorgan") of the East, and over all is the thick cradle cover above described.

2. MARRIAGE

581 Marriages in the old days might be called "political." They were
584 alliances made by the head of the house with the consent of his brethren, for the purpose of strengthening the "house" and thereby the tribe, exactly as up to the present day Royal alliances have been made. The two young people had no voice in the matter, and were often betrothed before birth. A man would promise the next daughter born to him to a chief of another tribe who had a newly born son. The bride was purchased. In Montenegro, and, I believe, in the other Balkan lands, only a symbolic payment is now made. Among the Northern mountain tribes of Albania the bride-price, I found, was still paid in money or kind.

ALBANIA

583 Among the mountain tribes I found antique usages. House-lords
584 were anxious to dispose of their daughters and obtain wives of good stock for their sons. Early betrothal they declared necessary. Later on you could not find a good wife for your son. They were already disposed of. Everywhere they declared there were fewer women than men. In Maltsia e Madhe the price for a girl of good family was twenty napoleons: ten were paid on betrothal and the balance when the girl was handed over. I saw infants in the cradle who were already sold.

582 In this district the age for marriage had been raised lately, and some fathers told me they would not marry a girl under sixteen nor a boy under eighteen unless the house was very short of women to do the work. Then a boy of sixteen might be married to an older woman, sometimes to a widow. In the Pulati and Dukagini tribes girls were still sometimes married at thirteen and fourteen, and boys at fifteen or sixteen. I met a man of thirty who had a son of fifteen. His father
● [152] had married him to a widow of thirty. She was now old, and he complained bitterly that he could not get rid of her.

583 In Pulati and Dukagini the bride-price was less—sixteen to eighteen
162 napoleons as a rule. An elderly widow might change hands for a rifle or some other article. In all these districts, if a man lost his wife he was sometimes hard put to it to find money for another. A man with many sons found it not easy to wive them all well. There was complaint

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583 and ask the girl. The usual answer was that they were too modest.
 577 The suggestion seemed to be thought indecent.

581 The fact that both in Montenegro and Albania a word of Turkish
 152 origin is used commonly for "to make love" (Montenegrin and Bosnian, "ashikovati"; Albanian, "ashik," lover—"ashari," love) suggests that love-making played little or no part in the marriages of both lands. I heard that the son of an Austrian mother and an Albanian father was betrothed and asked his mother if he was much in love. "O dear, no!" she cried. "Not in the least; he is quite Albanian!"

183 One case only I met in which—perhaps for the first time—a betrothal
 583 was broken and the girl left free to marry. She was the niece of Mgr. Premi Dochi, mitred abbot of the Mirdites, a very remarkable man, whose death during the war was an immense loss to Albania.

I passed the night at her father's house. The girl sat sullen and glowering in a corner like a wild cat at bay. No one spoke to her. I asked what was the matter. She had refused to be sent to her betrothed. Her father was furious. Only the abbot's intervention had saved her. He talked the young man into admitting that it was useless to marry a girl who hated him and would probably run away, when another more amenable could be found, and got him to swear that no blood-vengeance should be taken if the girl married another. But the father, enraged, declared often and loudly, "A girl marries to please her house and not for herself"; and rated her till I was sorry I had asked. Awe of the abbot alone had made him yield.

585 *Marriage Ceremonies.*—When the wedding-day is fixed the male relatives of the bridegroom go to fetch the bride. The bridegroom usually does not go. As the tribes are exogamous the distance may be considerable. Sometimes the men of the bride's family take her to a spot half-way and hand her over there. Sometimes she is fetched from her father's house. Moslem girls are always accompanied by one or two female relatives. Christian girls usually are, if the journey is a long one; but not always. In no case does the mother go.

Marriage among the Christians is according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

I was never at a mountain wedding, but was told some local ceremonies. In Klementi the bride, on coming to her husband's home, must throw an apple over the roof, and is given some corn. This recalls the confarreatio of the Romans. She is then led three times round the hearth. All through the mountains I gathered that a bride must enter the house with her right foot first and carry in a male child with her. On marriage the hair of the woman is dyed black and dressed differently from that of a virgin. There are various modes, according to district. In the Malsia e Madhe the head is shaved in front and over the temples,

Birth, Marriage, and Death

enable her to bear male children. The ladies again sang songs of greeting. Then the two bride-leaders manipulated the bride as though she were a lay figure. She was absolutely passive. They raised her to her feet, set her feet one after the other, ahod in the wedding-boots, on to the steps of the carriage, and then on the ground. They then draped her with the red silk handkerchief sent her yesterday, and pinned it to the top of her head. Supported under the armpits she was slowly shuffled across the yard. It was but a few yards long, but her passage took full ten minutes. She was pelted with sweets, which a crowd of children gathered, and sprinkled with holy water, and led into the women's room. The bridegroom then arrived on foot and went to the men's room. I followed the bride. She was led backwards, and seated, still blinded by the veils, upon the chair in the corner. Her hands were laid on her sash and nervously grasped a folded handkerchief. Her immobility as her attendants handled her was so inhuman as to be almost horrible. One of her leaders carefully lifted a corner of her head-coverings and gave her lemonade to drink under it. The attendants themselves were then ceremoniously served with refreshments. They then removed her wedding-boots and put on the slippers, raised her to her feet, lifted a corner of her veil, said good-bye under it, and withdrew. The poor bride still stirred never a finger, but the violent heaving of her breast showed her on the verge of hysterics. She pulled herself together and the ordeal continued. One of the bridegroom's female relatives unpinned the red handkerchief from the bride's head and held it as a screen before her. Behind it her headdress was changed. Her white veil was removed, and a yellow beflowered silk one substituted.

The great moment had now come. We were to see her face. A lady on each side of her threw back the veil and showed her off. She was exposed to a crowd of staring females. Her head dropped modestly. Her attendants each placed a finger under her chin and raised it again. The sweat streamed down her face. They wiped it. They straightened her wide coat, settled her sash, and waved the flies off her. Such was her Spartan heroism that when a fly, unobserved by the attendants, crawled up her face, she did not even by a twitch show that she was alive. Then a front row of chairs was arranged and all the men came in. The bridegroom, witnesses, and father took their seats. The background was crowded with miscellaneous youths. They stared with all their eyes at the luckless girl, who in vain dropped or turned her head, only to have it put straight again.

Only the bridegroom held his head down and would not look. His witnesses grasped his chin and made him look, and he faltered, "But I've seen her already."

The wedding song then began:—

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How beautiful is the bride, Mashallah, Mashallah.

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She has a forehead for a "perishan" (gold ornament of coins, etc.).

Her eyebrows are like braid, Mashallah, etc.

Her eyes large as coffee cups, Mashallah, etc.

Her nose is like a gold coin ("muskala").

Her cheeks like sweet cake ("gurabi," given at night by the bride to the bridegroom).

Her mouth is like a casket, Mashallah, etc.

Her teeth like pearls.

Her neck like a lily. Her figure is like a standard

585 sang the ladies, the men roaring: "She is, she is!" in a high falsetto, pressing their hands on their ears, and the small boys yelling "Mashallah," a strange cry at a Catholic wedding. All the time her two attendants

[152] patted, straightened, and wiped the bride. My neighbour whispered to me: "They often faint." I anxiously watched her panting and swaying, and was relieved when the bridegroom left the room and the men followed. The ladies then bent the bride's knees and she plopped on to the chair. By now she was almost hypnotized, and mechanically at intervals tried to rise, but was at once replaced unless a child came in, when it was correct for her to rise for a moment. Then came midday and the wedding dinner, to which I did not stay. The bride is allowed to withdraw for a time. She does not eat with the guests. Her attendants

[64] put little bits of food into her mouth. If very modest she does not take it, but when left alone secretly consumes some food she has hidden in her marriage coffer. On my return she was again enthroned. I was given three tumblers of wine and a dish of sweets and told to consume them, and did my best. I was then given a special view of all the bride's ornaments, and invited to return at night for the final ceremony. This I did not do. It was described as follows: The two attendants prepare the bed at midnight. They undress the bride and put a long silk shirt on her; lay her forcibly on the bed, and withdraw. The two male witnesses then lead or drag in the bridegroom and prepare him. The [833] wedding guests all stand outside the door when the couple are left [533] alone, and sing epithalamia of an encouraging nature and shout advice through the keyhole. The bride has to feed the bridegroom with the "gurabi" (cake) she has brought in her wedding coffer.

The company sings continually till told the marriage has been consummated. In a short time the bride and bridegroom emerge completely redressed. She wears a married woman's dress. They are greeted as man and wife and at last left in peace.

585 The whole of the next week the bride may be visited at any hour
574 of the day and must not speak a word, but sit rigid as before.

At the end of the week she has a holiday and goes back to her own people on the Sunday. On the Wednesday her husband is invited to

Magic, Medicine, Soothsaying

the younger from looking at the bones because we were all happy, so "why pry into unknown evils?"

It is not easy to say how the bones are read. Bone-readers will not tell their lore. I have pieced together the facts I gathered. The bone must be the breast-bone of a fowl (Fig. 20), or the blade-bone of a sheep or goat —no others serve. In Albania I found the fowl's bone most generally used, and in Montenegro the sheep's blade-bone. In both lands the fowl or sheep must have been bred by the house of the reader; otherwise, though it can tell of foreign affairs, it knows nothing of the fate of the house. The best fowl is a cock which is black without a white feather. It must be decapitated. If the neck were wrung the blood would all go wrong and the marks be useless.

This is the Albanian reading of the breast-bone: A good seer can tell at once if the fowl has been bought or bred. The keel is the part used. In the thickness of the neck-end (A) runs a line of marrow which tells the fortune of the house. A hole in it means the house-lord's death, and a break means an illness or accident.

Breaks and branches from this main line show illness, accident, or death to members of the family. Red spots and patterns in the bone mean blood. Some holes mean graves, others cradles, according to where they are placed. I failed to learn where. The sides (B) of the bone tell public events.

When a line belonging to the family forks it means a quarrel in the family.

The late Mgr. Cozzy, Apostolic Delegate at Scutari, told me that he had tried hard to learn how to read the bones, and a man who refused to tell him said: "You make black marks on paper and know what they mean; but I do not. God makes marks on bones and you do not know what they mean; but I do."

Such is the belief in bones in Albania that I believe men have died from sheer terror when their death has been read. Thus, an only son—well known to a friend of mine from Djakova—was at a family feast. He picked up a fowl's bone, looked at it, and threw it down with a cry. His father asked what was the matter and the youth said: "In three days you will bury me." His horrified father picked up the bone and saw the reading was only too true. He cried out in grief: "In three days we shall bury thee." His kith and kin wailed on all sides: "In three days we shall bury thee." The poor lad blanched and sickened. He could not eat, gave up hope, and died.

"When he saw in the bones he must die," said the Djakovan, "he died." And with more truth than he was aware of he added: "You

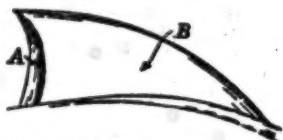


FIG. 20.—FOWL'S BREAST-BONE FOR SOOTHSAYING

unpardonable indignities, and over her dead body
the brother and sister swore to utterly exterminate
her enemies.

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Some years later Shainitza was grieving for the death of her favourite son, Aden Bey. So wild was her sorrow that she smashed with a hammer all his and her own diamond ornaments, burnt all her cashmeres and valuable furs, and forced his young widow to lie on straw mats spread on the ground instead of on a bed. The mirrors and ornaments of her serail were also destroyed, its windows were by her order painted black,¹ and everything which in any way recalled joy or happiness was banished from the palace. Roused from this abandonment of grief by the news of the fall of Gardiki,² she wrote to Ali reminding him of the oath they had sworn together over their mother's corpse, and of her wrongs and theirs, and urged him to have no mercy on the inhabitants of that town. "As for me," she added in conclusion, "it is only on cushions stuffed with the hair of the women of Gardiki that Shainitza will henceforward repose!"

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[788]

Faithfully was the terrible oath, sworn to the dead, kept both by brother and sister. The chief men of Gardiki, to the number of some three hundred, induced by fair promises to meet Ali at the Khan of Valieré, were there ruthlessly massacred by the Christian troops under his Greek lieutenant, Thanasé

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¹ See p. 265; and compare similar custom in folk-tale, p. 315.

² In 1802. A Greek folk-song graphically describes the gallant defence made by this town, which was taken by one of Ali's lieutenants, "Yousouf the Arab" (*Greek Folk-songs*, p. 234).

175 Vaghia,¹ not one escaping. Shainitza caused the town
 159 to be razed to the ground, and, after cutting off the
 [669] hair of the women with every insult which she could
 heap upon them, this tigress in human form drove
 them forth with their children to the mountains,
 menacing any with a like doom who should venture
 to give food or shelter to the objects of her wrath.
 The traveller passing through the valley of Drynopolis
 may to this day see in the wall of the khan the tablet
 which records, in letters of gold, the number of the
 dead and the date of their sacrifice to the *manes* of
 the mother and the fury of the sister of the Vizier of
 Ioannina.

[428] In a codicil to her will, Khamko directed that a
hadji, or pilgrim, should be despatched on her part to
 lay offerings on the tomb of the Prophet, and pray
 there for the repose of her soul. Such pilgrimages
 788 and offerings may, however, only be made when the
 expenses are defrayed with money lawfully and
 honestly acquired. And as it was found on inquiry
 into the estate of the late Veli Bey, Ali's ancestor,
 that the property to be sold for this purpose had been
 taken by force or fraud from a Christian, the pilgrim-
 age was disallowed by the religious authorities.

175 Such extreme ferocity of disposition as that mani-
 159 fested by Khamko and Shainitza is, however, excep-
 562 tional among Albanian women, and even in Ali Pasha's
 [152]

¹ The Greek poet, Aristotle Valaorites, has made Thanassé Vaghia the subject of one of his most striking poems, 'Ὁ Βρυκόλας', "The Vampire," a translation of which may be found in my *Greek Folk-songs*, p. 121. The tragedy of 'Ἡ κυρὰ φροσύνη', "The Lady Phrosyne," by the same writer, part of which I saw acted in an open-air theatre at Salonica, gives a vivid picture of Ali Pasha and his Court.

their young wives in charge of their parents. 463
 For with the Skipetars, as with the majority of 593
 Oriental peoples, patriarchal customs still survive, 591
 and all the sons bring home their brides to the
 paternal roof, there to remain in subjection to the
 parents-in-law until they shall themselves be heads of
 families.

The highest aspiration of an Albanian wife is to be the 562
 mother of boys, and she is less proud of her own beauty 593
 and the rank of her family than of the number of her 181
 sons and of their valour. The mother of many sons is
 sure of the lasting affection of her husband, enjoys the
 respect and consideration of the rest of his family, and
 wields great authority in the household to which she
 has come as a stranger. As they never permanently 888
 leave the paternal roof, she may look forward to their 593
 support and affection in her old age, and to see their
 children growing up around her. When her husband [484]
 leaves his home for a sojourn at a distance, custom re-
 quires that she should manifest no grief at his depar-
 ture. Instead of accompanying him to the threshold,
 and watching his familiar figure disappear in the
 distance, or going to meet him on his arrival, she
 hides herself at both the moment of his arrival and of 484
 his departure. A woman's tears or joy, they say, must 562
 not soften a man's heart when his duty lies before [152].
 him. Neither must they ask for news of them at any
 time during their absence. Yet in the depth of their
 hearts no wives more regret the absence of their hus-
 bands, as the touching little superstitious observances [777]
 with which they console themselves testify. Un- [789]
 known to their partners, they sew in their clothes

THE WOMEN OF TURKEY. [CHAP. VIII.]

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small objects, which they themselves have worn, as talismans to ensure their safe return, and during their often protracted absences they resort to various methods of divination, either with or without the aid of a professional wise woman, in order to discover how their beloved spouses fare, where they sojourn, and how they are occupied.

● 152 The men on their side are not free from homesickness, and many are the pathetic little exile-songs, 593 in which their longings for their native mountains, and for the beloved ones from whom they are, for a time, separated, find expression. One may serve as a specimen :

[539]

Now in Bender, now in Buda,

Bide we lone and desolate.

Patience, heart ! What boots complaining,

So it hath been willed by Fate.

Yet this grievous bitter exile

Cannot longer still be borne ;

Is't naught that we like felons wander

From Fatherland as outlaws lorn ?

Who the exile's griefs can number ?

Say whose woes can equal mine ?

Even the viper, should she sting me,

Poisoned by my blood would pine !

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The amusements of the Albanian women are, for the most part, limited to birth and wedding festivities, at which singing and dancing are the principal features. Albanian dances are of two kinds: the Pyrrhic, as it is called by travellers, which is usually indulged in by the men, and a kind of "kerchief dance," which is affected by the women, the two sexes always performing separately. The women dance in couples,

585 same way on the Friday. On this day, too, the women assemble to help in the preparations for the ceremony. While some busy themselves with putting finishing touches to the trousseau, or helping in the kitchen, the others take the bride in hand and commence to "busk" her for the occasion. Compelled by custom [302] to submit silently to whatever operation they may, in their zeal to make her as beautiful as possible, subject her, the poor bride is bathed, scrubbed, "massaged," and *dépilée*, her hair and eyebrows are dyed black, and her feet and hands stained red with henna.

On Sunday evening the bride, dressed in her bridal array, and decked in all her ornaments, is presented to the women of the family. If she is of humble station, jewels are borrowed for her to wear for the occasion, so that, on this day at least, she may lack nothing. The work of the women who have dressed her is then freely and openly criticised, no word, however, being uttered which could possibly hurt the feelings of the bride; for, according to the good ladies of Scutari, a bride can never be otherwise than beautiful. Later on the father and brothers enter, and the maiden, throwing herself at their feet, asks their pardon with tears for all the faults she has since her childhood committed. [152] Hardly has the father raised her than a chorus of sobs and cries is heard from all the company, who thus testify their sorrow at the approaching separation of the maiden from her family. When their grief has exhausted itself, they dry their tears and break into a song, which, translated, is as follows:—

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THE WOMEN OF TURKEY.

[CHAP. IX.]

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[539]

Remorseless, Death, I know thou art,
 Yet, from a mother lone,
 How couldst thou take her only son,
 Her boy, her dearest one!

Why didst thou not, my treasured child,
 My only darling son—
 Why didst thou not resist his blow?
 My boy, my dearest one!

Ah! knew'st thou not, within my heart,
 Should'st thou from me be gone,
 Thou ope'st a wound must ever bleed?
 My boy, my dearest one!

- [152] Sometimes, too, as among the Greek women, a mourner finds no adequate outlet for her grief in the conventional dirges, and, inspired by sorrow, bursts into an improvised lament for the lost son, brother, or husband, extolling his virtues and bewailing his fate.

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It is said that when an Albanian of the mountains is led to execution by the authorities for any crime but that of theft, which is by these people alone considered disgraceful, he walks to his doom with head erect and bearing dignified, improvising as he goes his own dirge, in which he relates the circumstances that have led to his premature departure from the world. His mother and sisters follow him to the place of execution, their hearts devoured with grief, but wearing smiles on their lips, in order that their relative may, on his side, show no sign of weakness. Intently they listen to his death-song, the words of

which they treasure in their memories, and hand down to their posterity.¹

The funeral, in conformity with the usual Eastern custom, takes place within four-and-twenty hours after death. Before the corpse leaves the house, it is measured with a string, which is then thrown up into the rafters. If the deceased has not a silver ring on his finger, a coin is placed, as among the Greeks, on the mouth; and one of the relatives seats himself three times on that part of the floor on which he breathed his last. On the way to the burial ground, the men surround the bier, the women follow behind, and resume their wailings as the procession leaves the house. Arrived at the mosque, or church, the men enter, but the women remain without, weeping, shrieking, and lamenting continually. Before leaving the church, the men give the dead a last kiss, the women doing the same at the grave. The body is laid in the bare earth, and a stone slab is placed over it, on which the earth is cast. At this stage of the proceedings, the cries of the women become quite heartrending; they crowd round the grave, and can with difficulty be prevented from throwing themselves

¹ This calls to mind Burns' spirited song, "MacPherson's Lament," the words of which might fittingly be used by an Albanian *pollikar*:

"I've lived a life of sturt and strife;

I die by treacherie;

It burns my heart, I must depart,

And not avenged be.

Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,

Sae dauntingly gaed he;

He played a spring, and danced it round,

Beneath the gallows tree."

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